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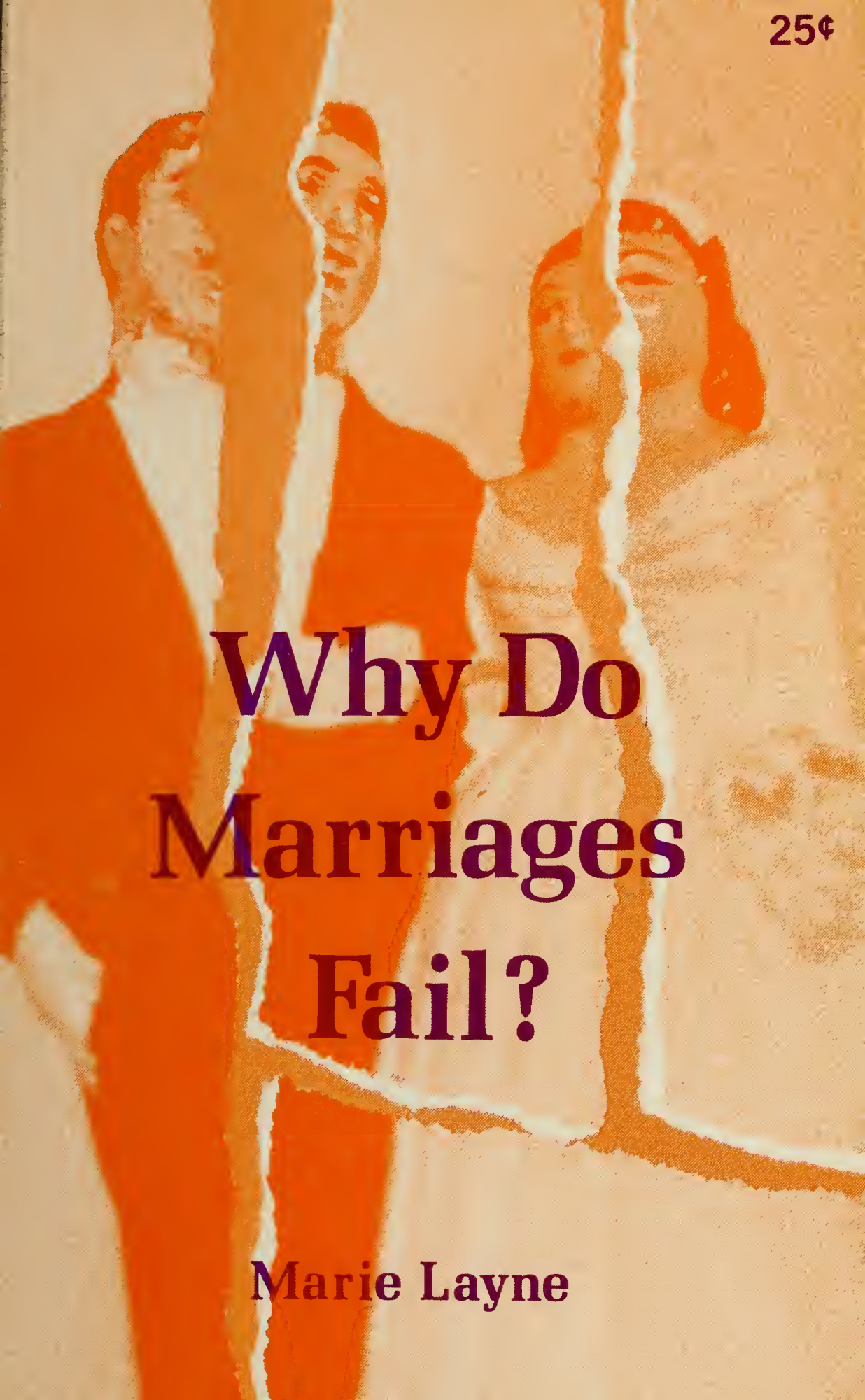

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INTRODUCTION

"They are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, let no man separate what God has joined." These words of Christ from St. Matthew's Gospel point out that Christian marriage is a three-way contract between man, woman, and God. Why, then, is there a constantly increasing and appalling number of marriages today that fail? Basically, it is because God is being ignored.

Here in the United States, two out of every five marriages wind up in the divorce court. And this statistic does not include those who separate after living together for some time without benefit of contract.

People fall in love. They decide to marry. They yearn to be together, to spend the rest of their lives with each other. Then suddenly it happens. Some men can't stand their wives any longer. Some women actually say they "hate" their husbands. A deep-seated feeling of resentment, of frustration, and even contempt exists. They have come to the end of the line. Not able to cope with it any longer, they decide it is best to set each other free.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY MARRIAGE?

This question has often been posed by individuals who feel deeply frustrated when they realize that their marriage is headed for a sea of trouble. But an unhappy marriage need not get out of hand. There are many symptoms of a sick marriage. Psychiatrists, physicians, clergymen, and marriage counselors are convinced that there is a great deal which can be done to help people save a marriage which has drifted and is "on the rocks." These experts view marriage

problems from many diversified angles. They do agree, however, on the twin enemies of marital bliss: immaturity and lack of communication.

The *immature* individual is one who has not yet arrived at full development. Development refers to the spiritual as well as physical. Nature does its share to care for the physical. But the spiritual aspect requires the best cooperative efforts of the individual. But the term "immaturity" must be used with caution because the scientific, or clinical, delineations of maturity are far from complete. Then too, people often use the word "immature" rather loosely, implying that it always means moral frailty. However, immaturity is a realistic designation of the causes of failure in most marriages which wind up in the divorce courts in a very short period of time.

As a rule, adolescents are not ready for marriage and its responsibilities. This is, in all likelihood, more than just obvious. Extensive studies, over a long period of time, clearly indicate that many teenagers who marry are immature, especially

in social development. By marrying, they are seeking to avoid the stresses, the frustrations, the insecurities of adolescence. They strive to achieve adult status at one single stroke by saying, "I do." It must be noted, however, that not all teen-aged marriages fail.

Many immature couples relate to each other as rivals. They battle their way through life. Other young couples grow up. But in the process they actually grow apart and they sign a truce with an amiable "agreement to disagree." There are still others who grow up together in a marriage which is, perhaps, all the stronger for the long, hard, tedious struggle it cost them to achieve.

Marital maladjustment leads to unhappiness. Obviously, well-adjusted, happy couples are not likely to apply for divorce or even entertain such thoughts. But it is also true that many unhappily married couples live out their lives together without ever dreaming of a divorce or even a separation. Individuals and couples vary greatly in their degree of tolerance. The kind and degree of malad-

justment which makes one couple intolerably unhappy is tolerated by some couples, not happily, but in varying degrees of acceptance and in resignation. There is still a great deal to be learned about the personality attributes which account for these many variations. (For further insights on married maturity we recommend *Ten Tests of Maturity for the Married,* published by Liguorian Pamphlets and Books.)

Lack of communication is a difficulty that people must face in all walks of life. And many a failure in marriage can be traced to this one cause. (New insight on this problem can be gained by reading the Liguorian pamphlet *What Men and Women Should Know About Each Other.)* Under this heading, the experts list: money, in-laws, religion, raising children, social interests, choice of friends, and sex.

Alcoholism or compulsive gambling is not listed as an area of conflict by some experts, though it is conceded that these can be and often are problems. These exceptions are signs of more deep-rooted

psychological problems. For example, to quote a noted psychologist, "The compulsive gambler is bent on destroying himself."

KEEP GOD IN YOUR MARRIAGE

Like all the sacraments, marriage must be approached prayerfully. Married people should live in a state of prayer, constantly drawing on the graces of this sacrament. Almighty God gives man this channel for the purpose of supplying his needs. Happiness can come only through God. You, then, must turn to God often. After giving him due worship, be not afraid to speak to him about your trials and tribulations. God will listen if you but speak to him. He will understand all you have to say. He will read the urgent need and plea in your hearts. If you but express to him your longings, your hurts, your failures, and even your disappointments, he will always answer.

The failure of an appalling number of marriages can be traced to the fact that almighty God and prayer to him are being ignored. Man and woman cannot hope to succeed in a happy marriage without God

and his help.

It is heartbreaking to see so many men and women leaving God out of their marriages. From whom, then, shall they receive the blessings which are so vitally needed for a successful marriage? Christ said: "Wherever two or more are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And where are two found together more in his name than in the holy sacrament of Matrimony?

Even after God unites a couple in marriage it is possible, in various ways, to lose his presence in the home. Perhaps the most obvious way is by neglect of religious duties. (Two Liguorian pamphlets, *Why Your Family Needs Religion* and *Why Your Family Should Pray,* are recommended readings in this area.)

To keep God in your marriage it will prove profitable on occasion to review the duties and the privileges highlighted in the marriage ceremony. Even a brief consideration of the words "for better or for worse" should help you to bear any hardships which come your way. God is able to judge your worthiness for better

things through adversity. Christ MUST be in every marriage. For where he is not, the union cannot hope to survive. God created man and established all which pertains to married life. No creature can take his place in any human heart.

MARRIAGE AND LOVE

The Church, which represents Christ at the marriage ceremony, will last till the end of time. It is still growing. Basically, its teachings remain the same, expressed in the language of the age. We must recognize it. We must live with it. We must live by it. The experience of centuries has been the basis for the Church's teaching on the sanctity of married life. And if marriage is to remain holy as Christ decreed, each partner must be willing to renounce selfishness for the greater good of all concerned.

"Love," said St. Paul, "is patient; love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth. There is no limit to love's

forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure" (1 Cor 13:4-7). Today however, many people seem to think that love is concerned only with self-satisfaction. When such people marry, their partners become *objects* to gratify their own pleasure, not *persons* to love and be loved.

Marriages may be made in heaven, but they must be lived here on earth. If the love between spouses is purely emotional, there is no solid basis for happiness in their union. Such love begins to wear thin after the novelty of physical sex disappears. Mutually mature love cannot evolve from a relationship that is founded on emotion alone.

Genuine love is a combination of many things, which can all be reduced to a happy blending of the physical and spiritual. Obviously, love is expressed in a physical way. But the motivation for this physical expression must come from within. It must be spiritual, in the sense that thoughts of self are forgotten. Each says, not necessarily in words: "I *give* you my love." This is what is meant by the

adage, "love means giving." When both give simultaneously, then love is perfect. They know, of course, that when both give, both will receive. But receiving is not uppermost in their minds. This is the spiritual element of their partnership. They give themselves completely to each other.

Ideally, marriage will be as we have described. And in such a union, love will truly mean that "we never have to say we're sorry." But because we are imperfect human beings, problems will arise in every marriage. Many of these difficulties can be eliminated if we recognize the basic physiological and psychological differences between men and women. Germaine Greer and her group seemingly can do nothing about the physiological; they do question some of the psychological differences. But there is no valid evidence to disprove that by nature men try to use reason in their approach to life, whereas women tend to be ruled more by their emotions.

In this sense, man is head of the family because, ordinarily, he is the breadwin-

ner. Unfortunately, some men seem to think that this makes them "master" and their wife and children "slaves." What it really means is that he assumes responsibility for the temporal and spiritual welfare of the community he and his wife have established. On the other hand, woman is the heart of the family. Her sympathetic nature prepares her to be wife and mother. An inspiration to her husband and consolation to her children, she gives the needed comfort and assurance so necessary in every home.

A body without a head and without a heart is twice dead. So with the body of the family. And when both head and heart work together, health and happiness emerge. Married couples would do well to meditate on the following words from one of the marriage rituals: "Henceforth you belong entirely to each other; you will be one in mind, one in heart, and one in affections. And whatever sacrifices you may hereafter be required to make to preserve this common life, always make them generously. Sacrifice is usually difficult and irksome, only love can make

it easy; and perfect love can make it a joy." These are profound words of wisdom. A deep appreciation and a full understanding of them when applied to married life will bring true happiness to a family.

The important word in the above quotation is "sacrifice." Love proves itself by sacrifice. Married spouses who view it as an impossible chore will never mature in their love. When it is viewed with joy and with generosity of heart, an ideal marriage is in the making. Certainly, no sacrifice is wasted. Those made in the sacrament of Matrimony become sacrifices to almighty God.

Marriage unites couples in mind as well as in body. Consequently, the trials of everyday living can more adequately be met because of their shared concern. Real love will always make an individual think about his mate first. Each one needs the other. These needs, which no one can deny, must be met in both mind and in body.

If this thought is kept in mind there will be fewer occasions for "martyrdom" in

marriage. That old feeling of "being trapped" can become a vicious enemy of married life, tending to separate couples. Many a conflict will dissipate when love of God forms the basis for married love.

Love wishes to give of itself. It wishes to be shared. Often, it is seriously hindered by the thousand or more very selfish impulses which tend to completely destroy it or even cut it off.

A noted authority on the subject of marriage states: "Fulfillment in married life comes to those who don't seek it for themselves." Bringing happiness to others pays off in big dividends, for it brings, in return, happiness to ourselves. "Give and it shall be given to you." These words of Christ should be the motto of every married couple. Happiness comes to those who believe and practice them. Married life is a blessing which God bestows on man. It cannot possibly fail in the shadow of his divine presence.

MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN

When God grants children to a married couple he gives them enough help,

especially through the graces of the sacrament, to bring them up in the love and fear of God. This will naturally mean that parents can no longer be as carefree as they were before children entered the domestic circle. Just as they have to make sacrifices to prove their love for each other, so now they must deny themselves to show love for their children. This will not be difficult for conscientious couples because children are a projection of their own lives.

Happy homes make happy children. A child needs to feel loved and to be comforted when the need arises. He must feel that his home is the place where he can find the answers to his problems, where he knows loving arms await him when everyone else seems to be against him. He must sense instinctively the deep, penetrating love between his parents, a love which includes him in its strong embrace. With love as the basis of their relationship, he will become a balanced individual, one who is ready and able to take his place in the world.

Case histories of juvenile delinquents

show what happens when these qualities are absent from the home. In many instances, the troubled lives of these children can be traced back to a lack of a real family life, a lack of parental love and concern. These children are products of houses which have never really been homes to them, merely places where they take bed and board, and then take leave. Why do such families exist, families which know no love, no togetherness, no feeling of concern and understanding? To them, love is an empty word. They hear about it in song and story, but they cannot sing the song themselves nor live it in the story of their lives. Home, for them, has not been a place where they shared happiness, only misery.

But this need not be. Where love abounds, there is fulfillment for all concerned. Parents who prove their love for each other by their actions will have few problems with their children. Love is contagious; it influences all those within its orbit. If children hear their parents pray, see them participate in church services willingly, and observe them

practicing their faith in their personal and community life, they will follow the good example given. At first the children's actions will be only awkward imitations. But when they observe the honesty and sincerity of their parents through the years, these imitations will merge into convictions which will stand them in good stead for the future.

GUIDELINES FOR HAPPINESS

What can be done to prevent or cure marital failures? Here are some helpful guidelines.

1. **Share your interests.** Married people must continue to keep mentally alive individually by reading, and keeping up with the news both nationally and internationally. As a couple you should continue to attend functions together. You must keep alive and vibrant, so that you do not stagnate. Keep learning and keep growing should be your moto.

2. **Adjust to your differences.** Each partner brings to marriage a certain

pattern of habits and culture. Reaching a happy adjustment is important. Each must learn to accept the other person's individuality. Learn to "live and let live" and there will be fewer differences of opinion.

3. **Be a full-time companion.** Very often, married people love their partners sexually, but cannot tolerate them as companions. Marriages based only on sex do not last as a rule because the bedroom is only part of the home. Sex is essential to marriage, but tact, mutual respect, and kindness are also essential in order to make for a happy, congenial married life.

4. **Avoid being a critic.** Be a booster, instead. Couples should learn that a little praise restores confidence and a little sympathy proves love. It is pretty difficult to like someone who keeps tearing you down every chance he gets — finding fault constantly. Criticism, founded or unfounded, is often given only to build up one's ego. Hurt, humiliation, and disappointment (in one's partner) follow in its wake.

5. **Talk and listen.** It is equally as im-

portant to understand your partner's point of view as it is to push your own ideas. Very often, women seem to forget that men want to talk about things that happen at work. And many times, too, husbands seem to forget that running a home involves many problems that should be discussed between the two of them. Husbands and wives should budget their time so that they can give each other due attention. Discuss things sensibly with one another. Be considerate. Have your say, but make sure that your mate also has his say. Respect works both ways. Give a little and you get a little in return. Kindness works wonders when both man and wife are keenly aware of its need.

6. **Stop squabbling.** There will always be little quarrels in marriage, because no one is perfect. These should be settled as amicably as possible. Even healthy arguments, if handled properly, tend to strengthen a marriage, not weaken it. This happens when there is honest discussion without trace of rancor or bitterness. But don't go to the opposite extreme; the

silent treatment serves only to disturb you and disgust your partner.

If you discover that you quarrel frequently, stop to think. "What is happening to upset me so quickly? Am I really masking another complaint?" Try to get to the root of the difficulty. Solve it sensibly, with maturity and with good will. Perhaps the cause is a hidden hostility. When you find out what it is, use self-discipline to correct it. If in anger you say things you know you will later regret, don't be surprised when your partner replies in kind.

A periodic self or mutual check in these areas — followed by a program of reform — will contribute greatly toward peace and harmony in the family.

7. **Don't pout.** Pouting is for pigeons, not partners in marriage. Pucker up your lips for a kiss, yes, but not for a pout. Knitting your brow, making a long face, or hanging your head never solves marital problems. Sullen husbands and/or sulky wives are the bane of marriage. Don't just "sit in solemn silence" when trouble

comes. Calmly, openly, and honestly discuss the problem and you will have a much better chance to solve it.

8. **Don't nag.** Like all these guidelines, this refers to both husband and wife. To find fault with your partner is only human. But to continually scold and complain, even about small matters, is not only bad psychology but also poor religion. A change in your partner's way of acting calls for interior motivation. Nagging has never motivated any spouse — except, maybe, to murder. Try, rather, to cultivate the gentle word, the friendly tip, the constructive suggestion. More people are motivated to change by temperate speech than by intemperate scoldings.

9. **Remember, in-laws are not outlaws.** They can be nuisances, great friends, or mortal enemies. Try to make them great friends.

Your parents loved you as children, even as you love your own offspring. But you are no longer children. You have established a home of your own now. Mama's boy and daddy's girl are not just

playing house any more. True, you will make mistakes, even as your own parents did. As adults conversing with adults, you will listen to their advice and counsel, adapting it to your present situation. Most moms do have experience in household affairs that are well worth sharing. And dad's insights, gathered from years of keeping his nose to the grindstone, will prove invaluable to a young couple seeking success and happiness in their marriage.

So don't sell your in-laws short. Your parents want and need your affection. And you need theirs too. Invite them to your home. Keep in touch with them by letter or phone. Don't outlaw them from your lives.

10. **Live on a sensible budget.** Use sound financial planning at all times. Allow enough for the essentials of clothing, food, and shelter, together with a modest budget for entertainment. Don't ever undertake more then you can afford. If you want to keep your sanity, let the Jones family spend what they may. Live within

your means, and you will be much happier.

These guidelines are not meant to be cure-alls for the troubles of marital misfits; they are not potions to wipe out unhappiness overnight. But where intelligent and congenial individuals have married, the observance of them will safeguard the happiness of the home and will enable it to grow in richness, beauty, and mellowness with the passing years.

Thousands of couples will testify that these guidelines are not only practical but comparatively easy of achievement. Habits of peace, calmness, gentleness, consideration, kindness — all of these are simple to form when a dedicated effort is made from the very beginning of married life.

WHY DO MARRIAGES FAIL?

In the United States, two out of every five marriages wind up in the divorce courts. Why? Many experts zero in on the twin enemies of marriage happiness: immaturity and lack of communication.

This pamphlet does more than explain why marriages fail. Its main purpose is to point out how marriages can succeed by giving guidelines for happiness — guidelines that prevent marriage failures.

A thousand things make up the fabric of a happy marriage, all centering around Christ's words, "Give and it shall be given to you." With that foundation, no marriage should ever fail.

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